

Father Nick: He can 'reach anybody'

Farewell from Page 1A

Helping Hands Reentry Program in Seaside. He initiated a Sunday Supper at the church that has nourished thousands in his years here. His ministry extends from Astoria to Wheeler. "My family here is not only the Catholics," he said. His calling, he said, is to serve all people.

Dedication of the new 8,400-square-foot church in 2012 was the culmination of a 20-year effort by congregants, replacing the 97-year-old Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church with a new building more than twice its size. At the time, church council President Chris Rose credited Nilema for moving ahead despite the obstacles.

"We had four priests before Father Nick who all knew we needed a new church," Rose said. "Father Nick had the courage to say, 'Let's do it.'"

The building features a hand-carved life-size wooden crucifix from Nilema's homeland of Tanzania.

Working with law en-

forcement in Seaside is a role Nilema has participated in since his arrival. "When they need my help, they call me, when I need their help I call them," Nilema said.

Nilema was especially close with Sgt. Jason Goodding, the Seaside police lieutenant shot while making a felony warrant arrest in February. "With Jason it was heartbreaking because I worked with him so closely," Nilema said.

In mourning Goodding earlier this year, Nilema called the death "a big, big loss for our community." The officer had a passion for what he was doing, and "he was so willing to ask for help" when he needed advice or support to better serve Seaside.

"He was always telling me, 'You know, Father Nick, we have to put our efforts together to help take care of our people,'" Nilema said.

Nilema is returning to the Moshi Diocese in northern Tanzania.

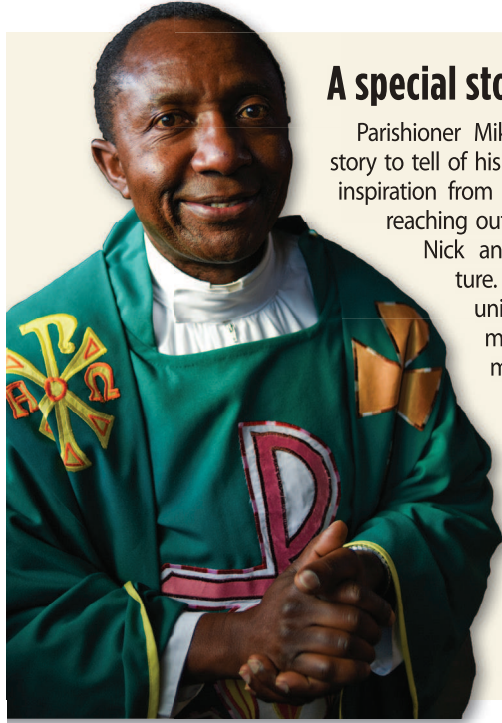
Arriving in Seaside will be a longtime colleague of Nilema's, Joseph Barita, 59, of Moshi, Tanzania. The two men grew up in the same town

in East Africa, and studied together at a seminary as young men. Barita and Nilema were ordained together — July 3, 1988 — and both have served in Oregon parishes. He first served in the United States in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, coming to the country in 2000. From 2010 to 2014 Barita served as pastor at St. Frederic in St. Helens.

Barita returned briefly to Tanzania when his father was ill, but is now returning to Seaside to take on the responsibilities of his predecessor.

"He is not only beloved, he has the ability to reach people," said parishioner Kay Foetisch-Robb of Father Nick, as he is affectionately known. "Small children run up to him, old people. He has the ability to reach anybody."

A farewell celebration takes place tonight, Friday, at Our Lady of Victory Parish Hall from 4 to 7 p.m. and at St. Peter the Fisherman Parish Hall in Arch Cape on Saturday, June 25, after the 5:30 p.m. Mass. The entire North Coast community is invited.



A special story to tell

Parishioner Mike Davies has a special story to tell of his longtime friendship and inspiration from Father Nick. "Thanks for reaching out to me regarding Father Nick and his imminent departure. I have a very personal and unique relationship with the man — with stories that might fill volumes. I've been associated with him for almost his entire 18-plus years in Seaside — in a wide variety of different roles. Initially I was one of his many new parishioners at Our Lady of Victory — a non-Catholic parishioner at that!

"But, as a result of his incredibly gregarious nature, we very quickly became friends. That friendship was cemented in 2001 when my family traveled with him and 12 other parishioners to visit his home in Tanzania, East Africa. The incredibly moving visit to his home parish high on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro was life changing — to say the least!

"Since that first visit, I have returned seven more times — each time accompanying visitors from around the United States and Canada. The strong personal relationships forged during these visits have broadened our world and our family — we now have an 'adopted' extended family in Tanzania — including our new, 9-month-old 'grandson!' My family — and our parish — are forever tied to Tanzania via the bonds forged by Father Nick!"

Community garden includes teaching area

Garden from Page 1A

Making something beautiful

The garden includes a teaching area and containers of different heights, making them accessible to all students.

Children from the district's youth programs — including the Learning Ladder preschool, after-school adventure and kindergarten programs and summer camp — have taken ownership of the garden and will sustain it, but Hassan hopes it gets used by other youth-centered agencies and organizations, like the Seaside School District, with its Broadway Middle School nearby.

"Were trying to make this really open, available and exciting," Blake said. "We have to eat as if our lives depended on it, because they do. And we really all have to get on board with that as early as we possibly can."

Shelly Saunders, the district's preschool and kindergarten coordinator, takes her students to the garden a few times per week to water the plants and check on their progress. She desires to give the children a foundation to learn about growing their own food and discovering how to use it.

The group's original intention was to build the Youth Garden at Seaside Heights Elementary School, where the after-school program for kindergarten and elementary students was relocated during the 2015-16 school year. Complications compelled a change of plans, but while they were waiting for their new garden to be built, the students were in-

structed by Hassan in container gardening and nutrition and got seeds planted to have starts ready.

"Every plant they wanted is out here in this garden," Hassan said.

Those plants include berries, apple trees, potatoes, cucumbers, parsley, curry plants and many more. In fact, Hassan mentioned, one of the first lessons during the Summer Camp's gardening activity may focus on thinning.

'A step program'

The Sunset Pool Garden is one of the Clatsop Community Gardens. Because it was inspired by children expressing a desire "to grow their own pizza," Blake said, two of the original 18 plots were dedicated to the After-School Program.

Hassan developed a curriculum around food production, gardening and nutrition that she has used during the district's Summer Camp. During camp this year, the gardening component will incorporate aspects of the Junior Master Gardener curriculum.

"We're not going to adhere to it strictly, because it's actually written for school gardens and we only have the kids for a few weeks during the summer, but it's got some wonderful information," Hassan said.

However, the garden will get used to some degree for various programs throughout the year.

"The wonderful thing about our climate is we can grow things all year long," Hassan said.

With the Learning Ladder program expanding this fall to add a full-day option and afternoon enrichment activities,



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Josef Barbic, Raiden Bowles and Sam Beaudoin received plaques and gifts from the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District for building the Youth Garden as their Seaside High School Pacifica Project.

students will be served lunch, and Saunders sees that as an opportunity to use items grown in the garden. Students also can take produce for their families, and the excess is donated to the local food pantry.

Garden-style lessons have and will continue to teach respect, for both the garden itself and one another as multiple children tend to the plants together; water, plant and life cycles; preparing healthy meals and snacks; and many more. Instilling the value of good nutrition and healthy activities is "a step program," Saunders said.

"We're at this step here and we're going to go to the next step, because our goal is to provide a healthier alternative for children while they're here," she said.

A personal story of abuse, dysfunction

Recovery from life in a polygamous family

By Eve Marx
For the Seaside Signal



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Author Ruth Wariner at the Seaside Public Library.

I experienced a sense of disconnect putting together the calm and professional demeanor of the author Ruth Wariner, whose memoir, "The Sound of Gravel," with what I later read and what she related at her author event at the Seaside Library on June 16. Wariner, whose book was published by Flatiron Books, a division of Macmillan, is a pretty blond woman of about 40. She was the witness and the victim of unspeakable crimes, the worst being repeatedly molested for years by her stepfather. And yet she seems to have forgiven everyone. She doesn't even seem that angry about her stepfather. In a terrible way, he did give her a strong story to tell, something every great writer needs.

Wariner, who lives in Portland, grew up in the polygamist Mormon colony known as Colonia LeBaron, located in Mexico in the northwest state of Chihuahua. Her grandfather, Alma Dayer LeBaron, established his polygamist community in 1944 after a falling out with his Utah Mormon church. Wariner was her mother's fourth child and her father's 39th.

Wariner's own father, considered a prophet, was murdered by his own brother (who authorities called "the Mormon Charles Manson") when she was just a few months old. Her mother, not long after, became the second wife of a man named Lane with whom she had several more children. Lane begins fondling and molesting the pre-adolescent Wariner right under her mother's nose. He also molests two of her stepsisters, daughters of his first wife. The girls, when they tell their mothers, get zero traction. Wariner's mother denies her story and then stonewalls her daughter for years, saying that when confronted with the abuse, her husband cried and said he's sorry. For his own part in the matter, Lane tells his families that he hasn't done anything very wrong. "They're not my blood children," he says indignantly. "I would never do such a thing to my own blood."

To say the Wariner household is dysfunctional doesn't begin to cover it. There are two mentally disabled siblings. Her mother disappears for days on end, leaving the children with nothing to eat. Most days even when she is home, they subsist on bread and peanut butter. Boys and girls are pulled out of school by the age of 14 to work around the house or the farm. For years there is no running water in their falling apart adobe house; in the late 60's when Lane finally installs a modicum of modern conveniences, there is a real danger that one could be easily burned in the house or electrocuted. Two of her younger siblings are in fact electrocuted and die against an electric fence; Wariner's mother dies that way too, attempting to save them.

Before Wariner finally gets the courage at the age of 15 to steal

two of her younger sisters and run away, she is fully aware of how her mother and her mother's American-born sister wives make a practice of raping the U.S. economy, making monthly pilgrimages across the border into Texas to collect welfare and food stamps. Without judgment she describes her mother's facility to lie and tell inquiring social workers she doesn't know who the children's fathers are and that she's been with lots of men.

At the library presentation, Wariner asked for a show of hands. How many of you have read the book, she asked. There were not many. She said she would change her talk because she didn't want to spoil the book for anyone. She read a small section of the book that firmly established time and place while her husband (yes, she overcame the trauma of her early years to get her G.E.D., go to college, get a master's degree, marry a monogamous man, and become a teacher) orchestrated a slideshow of Wariner family photographs. The photos show nothing but smiling faces. One particularly charismatic photo shows Wariner on a pony, a beautiful blond tiny girl, seemingly happy as a clam.

The HBO television series "Big Love" and the TLC reality series, "Sister Wives," have offered American viewers a slice of polygamous Mormon life. These television shows give viewers the impression that multiple women being married to one man might not be so bad. On "Big Love," which is supposed to be fiction, there is some serious strife going on beyond female jealousy. On that show, people are kidnapped and they are murdered and very old men taking child brides. But until I read "Sound of Gravel" the full monty of polygamist Mormon culture for me had never been addressed.

I've since learned there is a pantheon of contemporary literature on the subject. Goodreads suggests "Escape," by Carolyn Bishop; "Stolen Innocence" by Elissa Wall; "Shattered Dreams" by Irene Spencer; "The Chosen One" by Carol Lynch Williams. Even the esteemed author Jon Krakauer has tackled polygamy in his book, "Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith." Yet I wonder how many people truly understand what goes on in a polygamous community. And why Wariner, who stays in touch with her biological siblings, some of whom practice polygamy, has shied away from calling the situation she escaped from what it is, a cult. "I love my family," she said.

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